

## Wildfire Plan Development and Organization

The Bear Lake County Wildland Fire Mitigation Plan will tier to the Idaho State Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan. Development and review of the plan was accomplished by the Bear Lake County Wildfire Group (BLCWG)

Participation in the BLCWG included representatives from:

- Bear Lake County Commissioners
- Bear Lake County Planning and Zoning
- Bear Lake County Volunteer Fire Department
- Idaho Bureau of Disaster Services
- Idaho Department of Lands
- Homeowners Associations
- County Residents and Landowners
- Bureau of Land Management, Upper Snake River District
- USDA Forest Service

Public participation was accomplished by distribution of questionnaires that address wildfire concerns and suggestions, website posting of the plan and space for community comments, participation by homeowners associations and information from community hazard identification and mitigation reports conducted within Bear Lake County by the Bear Lake Regional Commission for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in 2004. Draft copies of the plan were posted on the county internet site and at the courthouse for review.

## Bear Lake County Wildland Fire Plan Objective

The objective of the Bear Lake County Wildfire Plan is to mitigate wildfire risk and hazard vulnerability and documenting areas of risk to wildfire hazards. Action identified to decrease wildfire risk and hazards within Bear Lake County are focused on public safety, emergency services, county infrastructure, natural resources, fish, wildlife and property protection.

## 1.0 Overview

The wildland urban interface is defined as "an area where development and wildland fuels meet at a well-defined boundary while another term, wildland/urban intermix, serves to differentiate a more specific type of area. The intermix is defined as "an area where development and wildland fuels meet with no clearly defined boundary." NFPA 299, *Standard for Protection of Life and Property from Wildfire*, 1991 edition. The leading land use agencies are responsible for reducing the accumulated fuel hazards on the lands they administer; cooperating on information and education programs; providing technical assistance; developing agreements, partnerships and relationships with municipalities and private property owners, local protection agencies, States, and other

stakeholders in the wildland-urban interface areas. These relationships primarily focus on prevention activities before a fire occurs, which render structures and communities safer and better able to survive a fire event.

The purpose of this assessment is to provide a “snapshot” of current fuel loads and other factors contributing to or prevention of wildfire. The scope of the project includes the Federal, State and Private lands within Bear Lake County, Idaho. A preliminary high risk assessment was performed by Northwind Environmental Inc. for the west side of Bear Lake County. The remainder of Bear Lake County was inventoried by the Bear Lake Regional Commission and the two are combined into this document which is a compilation of those inventories, assessments and mitigation actions for unincorporated areas of Bear Lake County, Idaho.

The most important purpose of the Wildland-Urban Interface Communities-at-Risk Program is to protect life first, and property and natural/cultural resources second, based on relative values to be protected commensurate with suppression costs (Forest Service, 2003).

The objectives of the project are to develop a fire management plan, which will:

1. Improve fire fighter and public safety through:
  - a. Education and training
  - b. Fire prevention
  - c. Fuel modification
  - d. Wildland-urban interface standards
  - e. Coordinated fire suppression operations
2. Enhance fire protection through:
  - a. Improved fire prevention and public education
  - b. Improved coordination and cooperation of fire suppression agencies
  - c. Development of long term strategies for fire services and community consistent with agency policies
3. Reduce risks to stakeholders (residents, visitors, businesses, and government agencies) through identification and implementation of fuel mitigation measures such as mechanical fuel treatments and prescribed fires on private and federal lands
4. Reduce the potential for and the consequences of catastrophic wildland fire events.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to reduce the hazard of wildland fire within the area of Bear Lake County. An initial high-risk assessment was performed by Northwind Environmental Inc. for the western side of the county. An additional assessment covering all other area not included in the first assessment was performed by the Bear Lake Regional Commission. The two assessments are combined in this document to provide a seamless assessment and mitigation plan for the Communities-At-Risk program administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The benefit of fuel reduction, public education, and training the community on fire protection and prevention is a reduction in frequency of wildfires spreading from municipality or private property

on to public lands (BLM administered lands) and for wildfires spreading from public land to municipal property.

Cooperative efforts on the parts of community officials, private landowners, and the BLM will be required to implement a successful Community-at-Risk Program that will reduce the frequency of wildfires. Therefore, this hazard assessment has been performed to evaluate and identify areas with unusually heavy concentrations of fuels, over-mature and decadent fuels, and other factors that are believed to potentially increase the severity of fire behavior. The assessment area was also analyzed to identify slope, roads, land ownership status, location of homes and subdivisions, available fire suppression infrastructure, and any additional environmental impacts that may be within the assessment area. During this assessment process a public meeting was convened to disseminate information to and obtain information from the general public. The information that was gathered during the assessment is contained within this hazard assessment and mitigation report.

## **2.0 Bear Lake County-Community Profile**

### **Community Description.**

The assessment area includes approximately 35 subdivisions near or abutting BLM and/or Forest Service managed land near the Wasatch-Cache and Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Communities in the county included in the assessment include Fish Haven, Bloomington, Bennington, Geneva, Raymond, Liberty, Ovid, Bern, Bailey Creek, Pegram and Dingle within Bear Lake County (Appendix A: Figure 1).

**Population:** The total population of Bear Lake County is approximately 6,360 as of 2002 census. In the assessment area are numerous small towns, communities, single home sites, and vacation homes. The largest towns in the assessment area have only 100 to 200 year round residents, but recreational use of the Bear Lake area increases dramatically during the summer months to many thousands of people. Twenty seven subdivisions were examined in this assessment. Population generated by recreational opportunities will continue to grow over the next years. Population projections by Idaho Power are expected to be nearly 8,600 by 2025 while other projections (Woods and Poole) predict much less (6,900) in the same time frame. Woods and Poole prediction although less aggressive is more consistent with school population trends. Much of the population generated by recreational opportunities extends from the neighboring Wasatch Front Metropolitan area of Salt Lake City, Ogden and Provo.

**Ownership of land in the assessment area (approximate):** Within the assessment area boundary, the land ownership is: US Forest Service (USFS) <1%, BLM 6%, State 2%, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 7%, and private 84%. The Wasatch-Cache National Forest (USFS-administered land) trends north/south along the western boundary of the county while the Caribou-Targhee National Forest trends north/south on the eastern side of the county (Appendix A: Figure 4).